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Being Women, how I'm categorized: Deconstructing Women Portrayal in Pakistani Advertisement Landscape

Abstract

Television commercials have the potential to impact viewers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors by providing models from which viewers can learn. Indeed, research has demonstrated that contact with the media can influence viewers' beliefs about sex roles, as well as attitudes about politics, violence, and other aspects of the social world. Media usually depicts the desire rather than the reality. In the current study, a qualitative content analysis of eight top-ranked Pakistani TV advertisement of the year 2017 was conducted, with the purpose to identify the stereotyped portrayal of women in both contents and visual of Pakistani TVCs (objectification, irrelevant media sexualization, infanticization, victimization, and domestication) as presented by MediaWatch (1981). The results highlighted that all selected advertisements implied the same type of stereotypical themes in both contents of visuals of ads. Almost 50% of TVCs visual objectified women as compared to 40% of the written content, followed by 20% both visuals and written content used women seductive expressions to sell their product and finally 15% of visual and written content present women in the domestic sphere and bound in relationships. In conclusion, objectification is the most recurrent theme, displayed and practiced in all of the selected advertisements where women are shown as mere objects to gain attention, to please, and to increase the audience of a product.

Keywords: women portrayal, media representation of women, Pakistani advertisement, content analysis

Introduction

Television commercials have the potential to impact viewers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors by providing models from which viewers can learn. Indeed, research has demonstrated that contact with the media can influence viewers' beliefs about sex roles, as well as attitudes about politics, violence, and other aspects of the social world (Coltrane & Adams, 1997; Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Craig, 1992; White & Kinnick, 2000). Accordingly, viewers' interactions with television commercials have the potential to reformulate beliefs and expectations about women of different ages and their behaviors. Individual, environmental, and content-based factors temper the extent to which the media impacts viewers. Specifically, individuals are likely to attend to models they perceive as similar to themselves.

Moreover, commercials commonly depict women holding jobs and engaging in behaviors that remain stereotypic (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). Females are presented as a sex objects in most of the advertisements (Kumar, 2017; Nagi, 2014; Furnham & Bitar, 1993; Ferguson et, al., 1990). Kumar (2017) argued that to gain consumer attention marketing is the best way and advertisement is a powerful tool of marketing. Advertisements are the tools of gender socialization that teach gender-appropriate behavior. Research suggests that the advertisement promotes gender stereotypical roles that lead to gender-biased attitudes (Linder, 2004). Kilbourne (1990) found that exposure to women's stereotypical roles in advertisements provoke negative attitudes towards women especially related to managerial tasks. Another study concluded that exposure to sexually explicit images of women enhances gender-biased roles, aggression, and violence in interpersonal relations among men (Lanis & Covell, 1995).

Women are presented in non-active, decorative, and sexually appealing roles to grab audience attention towards a specific product. But at the same time, recent research depicts that women are under-represented in advertisements during all type of programs (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; White & Kinnick, 2000; (Signorielli, McLeod, & Healy, 1994), they are also presented as young compare to men (Atkins, Jenkins & Perkins,1991; Browne,1998; Furnham & Mak,1999; Heimstra, Goodman, Middlemiss, & Vosco, 1983; Larson, 2001; Roy & Harwood, 1997) even women children artists are less in number compare to men child artists (Larson, 2001).

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Females are projected as younger, married, unemployed, or if employed than in traditionally female occupations. Male is projected as middle age, employed, mature and social (Bartsch et al., 2000). Women are less portrayed as spokespersons and are presented as dependent, unintelligent home-bound consumers (Courtney & Whipple, 1974; Dominick & Rauch, 1972; Milner and Collins, 2000). Men, on the other hand, tended to be represented as independent, intelligent, impartial decision-makers who have knowledge and power. Furthermore, the use of male voice as voice-over support the notion (Courtney & Whipple, 1974; Culley & Bennett, 1976; Dominick & Rauch, 1972; Hirschman and Thompson,1997; Milner and Collins, 2000), that the male voice is more conclusive and authoritative than the female voice (Gilly, 1988).

Women are usually associated with the commercials of domestic and beauty products such as cleaners, dish wash bars, soaps, shampoos, clothes, whereas men are associated with non-domestic products such as cars, bikes, phones, and cameras (Bartsch, Burnett, Diller, & Rankin-Williams, 2000). Indeed, women are usually part of male-related ads but they mostly remain quiet and men perform the main activities such as Honda bike and Treat blade ads. Common sitting for women ads is domestic (Furnham & Bitar, 1993; Furnham & Farragher, 2000; Furnham & Mak, 1999; Mazzella, Durkin, Cerini & Buralli,1992) and men related ads are sit in non-domestic sitting such as roads, parks, and offices (Bretl & Cantor,1988; Furnham & Mak,1999). Women are also presented as thin, young, attractive, and sexually dressed compare to men (Signorielli, 1997). In an assessment of 1000 TV advertisements Blai, Stephenson, Hill & Green (2006) found that the female characters were limited to housewife/mother and hardly given any occupational roles. Such kind of stereotypical depiction of women in media can have a damaging impact on young girls who ascertains themselves with their role model shown in these advertisements.

Cultivation theory suggested that frequent viewing of media messages makes an individual prone to accept and believe these messages as real and true. As Pakistani women are the high consumption of media (Broadcasting Board of Governors, Gallup, 2014), that cultivate their attitude about the truthfulness of advertisements. They believe them as real and from these advertisements, young girls and women would learn that a devoted housewife is a culturally acceptable way for them. So they may learn to quash their aspiration of establishing their career of interest and exchange them with the "ideal" represented of women that they get through the everyday media. Media usually depicts the desire rather than the reality. The main aim of the present research is to explore how women are portrayed in a Pakistani television advertisement

Method

Qualitative content analysis of eight top-ranked TV advertisements from January-December, 2017 broadcasted during prime time from Monday to Sunday, was conducted. Primetime slot refers to the aired timing of programs between 8 pm and 10 pm, as these hours were considered as per recordings as peak viewership hours. These advertisements were selected from top-ranked channels (HUM, ARY, and GEO) according to their viewership frequency as identified by the Media logics (2017). The purpose of this study was to identify the stereotyped portrayal of women (objectification, irrelevant media sexualization, infanticization, victimization, and domestication) in Pakistani electronic advertisements during prime time.

Procedure

For content analysis, a coding scheme was prepared against which the content of selected dramas was coded by two coders having Ph.D. qualifications to enhance the reliability of the analysis, both were females as they would better code the data as per women portrayal lenses. After explaining the nature and purpose of the study accompanied with giving a brief demo about filling that coding sheet, they were instructed to analyze the data against the developed coding sheet.

Furthermore, the ads that were included in the sample were only national advertisements, all the other commercials including local commercials, political advertisements, sports events commercials, trailers for other television shows, awards events, and movies were excluded. Also, ads that were broadcasted multiple times during prime time were included multiple times as frequency count because it was important to accurately represent the occurrence of that particular portrayal that viewers see.

The unit of analysis was the leading female character in the commercials. A female character that appears in the camera frame both in terms of content and visuals formed the database of the current study. The

camera frame to be analyzed for the leading female characters was developed from the treatment of women in an advertisement by MediaWatch (1981) feminist organization and according to this women are portrayed in advertisements as follows; objectification, domestication, victimization, infanticization, irrelevant media sexualization (as cited in Graydon, 2009). Other codes included type of product endorsed in commercials, duration of the ads, central focus/ character under discussion, and the details of these ads are given in table 1.

Table 1. Coding Scheme Descriptive for Prime Time Popular Pakistani Advertisements (N=10).

Advertisements	Product	Date, Month and year of the release	Duration	Central Idea/ Focus	Character Description
Gul Ahmed	Clothing	Feb 16, 2017	35s	Women walking around streets boldly and talking confidently about ruling over their imperfections	Women with natural Beauty and imperfections.
Ponds White Beauty	Face wash	April 19, 2017	The 30s	A young and flawless woman confidently walks and talks to others after using a face wash	Young women with flawless skin.
Bright	Detergent	Jul 1, 2017	54s	A woman working as a restaurant manager introduces bright for stain removal on aunt's shirt and therefore because of her attitude she becomes the bride of aunt's son.	Women showing doing domestic chores well can be a lady of the house.
Sunsilk	Shampoo	Jan 5, 2017	1.06s	Woman preparing herself for her brother's wedding and trying out new hairstyle on every event.	Women showing in relationships and regarding beauty.
Sprite	Cold drink	May 8, 2017	1.03s	Women walking in the streets late at night with male friends, eating food, and screaming at the top of their voices.	Bold and skinny girl with flawless skin ad blond hair color wearing too much jewelry.
Coke	Cold drink	April 25, 2017	45s	Husband and wife got home from work, the woman makes tea for both.	Equality in-home chores among duals earners couple.
Veet	Hair Remover	April 28, 2017	30s	The woman can only be ready for going outside by removing hairs from the skin, so she can wear the appealing dress and hence can look beautiful, and then she can dance around the streets and enjoying herself.	Women's value and happiness depend upon appearance and physical attractiveness.
Lux	Beauty Soap	Jul 12, 2017	43s	Three women walking around wearing fancy bold and revealing dresses, glamorous makeup, smiling, and	Women value based on appearance, physical attraction can only be possible by the toned and skinny body and

				bathing. These are the standards of beauty they have specified for the general audience	physique.
Surf Excel	Detergent	May 27, 2017	2.20s	Women showing as a mother of a child who arouses partially deaf neighbor at the time of Sehri as a sign of goodness.	Women doing domestic work alone.
Walls	Ice cream	May 11, 2017	2.02s	The struggle of a mother to be close with her adult children and for this purpose she opted the latest technology to reduce the communication gap and try to spend some time with her children.	Culturally appropriate clothing and expressions.

Results

For coding the data by the coders in a similar way, the keywords/chunks have been assigned to the selected stereotyped content and visuals of advertisements keeping in view the definitions of the portrayal of women lenses as provided by Graydon (2009). The coders recorded the frequency with which each lens occurs in the data set for analysis.

Table 2. Examples of coding keywords from Camera Frame used in both Visuals and Content of Pakistani Popular Electronic Advertisements (N=10)

Advertisements	Camera frame used in		Keyword	Stereotyped Portrayal Lenses
	Content	**Visuals**		
Ponds White Beauty	"Ideal skin of women should be white".	"Happy and confident women have flawless and white complexion".	Physical attractiveness Health & Physical fitness	Objectification
Sunsilk	"Hair should be thick and long"	The close-ups of the perfect-looking hair revealed that thick hair is what a girl should have.	A spectacle to gain attention Focus more on Physical features	Objectification
Bright	A woman is shown handling a lady well and this leads to her marriage with that lady's son.	Skinny women are the ideal women. Women are shown in marital relationships.	Women are always shown in relationships.	Domestication
Veet	The woman should have smooth skin to confidently wander around.	The close-ups of smooth spotless skin with revealing dressing show women should have white spotless and smooth skin.	Physical attractiveness, Appealing dressing	Objectification Irrelevant sexualization
Lux	This Ad portrays that women should look beautiful by wearing jewelry,	The spotless white skins and perfect smiles put forward the stereotype of a	Physical attractiveness Women value and happiness based on	Objectification

	fancy dresses, and make-up. A woman is always conscious about how she looks.	beautiful girl being white and having a perfect smile.	physical attractiveness.	
			childish	Infanticization
Surf Excel	Women showing as a mother of a child	Only women can do the household work.	Women show in relationships. Domestic chores only for women	Domestication

Two female coders were involved in coding prominent women's portrayal lenses as reflected from the keywords taken from the operationalization of selected lenses from the literature. Both coders trained on the content analysis of the advertisements and in all cases, coding occurred individually. When the advertisements were coded, raters met to think about outcomes and resolve any available errors. As a rule, coders had the option to talk through inconsistencies and go to an agreement. Be that as it may, if an error couldn't be settled, the main creator settled on an ultimate choice.

The guidelines for identifying prominent women's portrayal lenses in all selected advertisements were given to the coders. For objectification the prominent keywords as identified from the literature were a spectacle to gain women's attention, women's value and happiness depend on appearance, physical attractiveness, health, and physical fitness, whereas appealing dressing, seductive gestures are the keywords that reflect irrelevant sexualization lens of women portrayal. Moreover, the domestication lens of women portrayal was reflected by the prominent keywords such as showing women in relationships and doing home chores and infanticization lens was the one depicted by the keyword of childish and silly behavior of leading characters while victimization lens was identified by the presence of suppressive and weak being and soft target for male brutality. Inter-rater reliabilities for the coding of advertisements were kappa=.86 and .87, for content and visuals camera frame used in the advertisements respectively.

To assess whether the frequency of stereotype portrayal of women lenses (objectification, irrelevant sexualization, infanticization, domestication, and victimization) in advertisements would vary across advertisements in both content and visuals, chi-square test was computed and the findings are given in table 3.

Table 3. Frequencies and Percentages of Stereotype Portrayal of Women Frames on both content and visuals of advertisements.

Frames	Contents f (%)	$\chi 2$	df	*p*	Visuals (%)	$\chi 2$	Df	*P*
Objectification	25 (52)	26.54	3	.001	24 (51.87)	20.77	3	.001
irrelevant sexualization	6 (11.54				6 (15.78)			
Infanticization	5 (10)				4 (11.98)			
Victimization	0 (0)				0 (0)			
Domestication	10 (26.5)				11 (20.37)			

Note. $\chi 2$= Chi-square

The above table showed that the most frequent lens of women portrayal in both ad's contents and visuals was objectification as the value of two separate chi-square test was statistically significant, the result also indicated that the second most frequent stereotyped lense for women portrayal was domestication as the percentage from all advertisements 26.5 % contents and 20.37 % visuals of these ads frequently showing domestication in selected advertisements. These results also highlighted that from both contents and visuals, half of the selected ads have presented women as an object of physical attractiveness, to gain attention, source to highlight the importance of health and fitness, and used her body language to sell products. Sunsilk, Bright, Sprite, Veet, Lux, and Pounds ads have exploited women's body language and physical attractiveness to grab audience attention. For instance, the Sunsilk ad portrays that a woman's hair should be thick and long to live an ultimate happy and good-looking life, for this purpose visually close-up frames of long and silk hairs are used. In the same way, the Veet ad promotes women's smooth skin to become confident by taking close-up frames of smooth skin. This reflects that the women's sole asset was her physical appearance. She has no quality other than her physical features. That's why such ads like Lux promote spotless women's skin, Pounds White beauty advertise white color as the social standard for women. Visually these ads display women wearing appealing dresses with larger-than-life sets such as Lux ads always a present woman as a doll wearing huge ball gowns

after using the soap. These ads are now showing the bathtubs and women getting ready or taking a bath which displays irrelevant sexualization.

Domestication is the second leading theme that is twice used in the content and visual of the portrayal of women in such advertisements on media. Ads such as Coke and Bright seem to display the fail side of womanhood and this stereotypical women portrayal has been used in their promotion. In Coke's advertisement, both men and women came home from their respective jobs, but it is the women who go into the kitchen to make tea. This suggests that women whether they are working or not, kitchen duties were their prime responsibilities. This ad has also presented women always bound in a relationship. The same is the case with the Bright ad where a woman tries to manage her job and house with a smile. These ads portray women as superhuman who have to be perfect at their homes regardless of their jobs. The prime setting of these ads was a house and most important kitchen and washing area. Irrelevant sexualization is the third most used theme but only one ad has used it. Veet ad has used appealing clothes to highlight the importance of silky smooth skin. This ad portrays that a woman in appealing clothes with smooth skin can wander around confidently. Such an approach has been achieved with appealing clothes and skin showing. Foreign locations with foreigners moving around, main model appealing clothes, and close-up frames of women's smooth skin are the few examples of irrelevant sexualization in the visuals of this ad.

Two out of ten selected ads were non-stereotypical, for instance, one of the non-stereotypical advertisements was the GulAhmed ad, as this commercial has used socio-culturally sanctioned behavior in portraying women. In GulAhmed ad women were presented with different physical imperfection which they accept happily, as their tag line (I like to live with these imperfections) conveys the thought of the ad which is free from any kind of stereotypes in portraying women in electronic advertisements.

An overview of the three most prominent themes used for portraying women in Pakistani primetime electronic media advertisements from both their contents and visuals were evaluated and compared using cluster Bar Charts in figure 1.
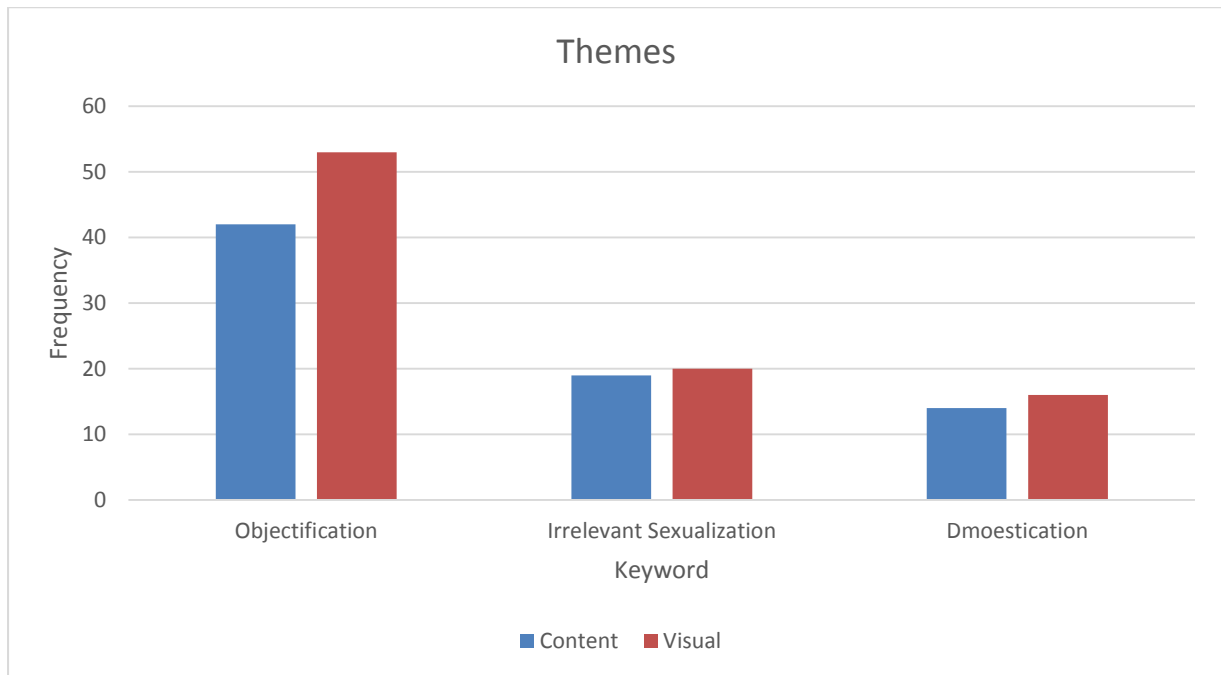

Figure 1. Clustered Bar Charts for most frequently used Stereotyped Themes for Women Portrayal in Prime Time Electronic Media Advertisement's Content and Visuals

Three main themes are used in the selected advertisement. All the selected advertisements have used more than 50% women objectification in their visual compare to more than 40% of the content. In the same way, irrelevant sexualization has been used in 20% of visual and 18% of the content of the advertisement, and finally, domestication is being used in 15% of visuals and 13% of the content of the selected electronic media prime time advertisements.

Discussion

In the analysis presented above, the portrayal of women in Pakistani media has been juxtaposed with references to Gradyon (2001) who presented multidimensional lenses of viewing a phenomenon (that are illustrated as victimization, domestication, Infanticization, objectification, and irrelevant Sexualization). In Pakistani TVCs, women are mostly presented as an object, which is there to attract more and more attention towards the advertised product. She is presented as the object to sell, object to please, and object to serve. In most of the advertisements, the woman is presented as the main object rather than the product. Shehwar, 2013 concluded in her study that women are used as an attractive and eye-catching element of the advertisement having the function of capturing the attention of viewers. Moreover, the results also highlight that the woman's bodily charm is used in ads related to physical fitness products, cosmetics, and those that add to the appearance of the body.

In Pakistani TVCs women are usually presented in a domestic residence. This practice even persists even in children's commercials, in which there are significantly fewer boys-only commercials in a home setting as compared to girls-only commercials. Advertisements impose women firmly within the private territory, a state commonly perceived as less cherished than the public sitting. . As the study Hawn, 2017 describes that in media women are still presented as homemakers who are content to raise children and interested in domestic pursuits only. This projection is reinforcing viewers to learn that appropriate social roles for women are limited to the domestic sphere, whereas men are can enjoy a wide variety of appropriate behaviors. Studies, like Ozmete's (2009), project that these commercials just do not go out into a vacuity, viewers watch them, engross and integrate the messages about who and what they should be into their own identities of what it means to be a "woman."

Sex sells is the oldest formula of advertisement and this idea leads to the sexualization of women in advertisements. Women's bodies and exaggerated beauty standards are the norms in television commercials. In their examination of MTV commercials, Signorielli et al. (1994) found that most women (75%) were depicted as having very fit and beautiful bodies, compared to three-fourths of men depicted as having average bodies. Moreover, women were rated overall as more attractive than men (more than half of female characters were rated as extremely beautiful compared to only 2% of male characters). Among commercials aired during shows most popular with adolescent girls, 32% of female characters were portrayed as having "thin" or "very thin" bodies. These commercials construct women's bodies as spectacles that should be used to gain and hold attention.

Women are used to just glamorize the ad even their presence is not required for example ads about gents' products, electronics, etc. Women models are used to boost the sex appeal and attract the audience even when it's irrelevant to the item being advertised. The survey of Pakistan Advertising Association has presented the findings that 83% of women are used in the advertisements where they are not even needed, 88% of women are used just to promote the products, 75% of all advertisements portray women for products used in kitchen and bathroom while 56% of advertisements portray women as domestic helpers or housewives and Men are presented in 43 professions whereas women are presented in 18 of them.

Pakistan's electronic media has undergone a revolutionary evolution which has completely changed the dynamics and characteristics which used to define traditional trends of Pakistani electronic media. Now few advertisements present the women in the non-stereotypical role they are presented as strong women who can go against all odd such as in advertisement of GUL AHMED and men can help their wife in house course such as in COCO COLA advertisement. But it is just a beginning we have to go a long way to finish the prevalent stereotype of women projection in Pakistani TVCs.

The media could have shown more creative ideas without gender discrimination so we can see women doing professional works and not just sticking to their family members and home chores. Also, media should focus more on promoting male characters sharing household activities for better living and their shared progressive future. Furthermore, more dramas should be made that will portray our women as free human beings in decision making and leading a constructive role in society and this role should be equal in opposition to showing male-dominant culture. Also, the media should portray women as to be cared more and protected like a diamond rather than like an object to be beaten or as mere amusement for the male gaze.

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